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# Death and Memory on the Home Front: Second World War Commemoration in the South Hams, Devon

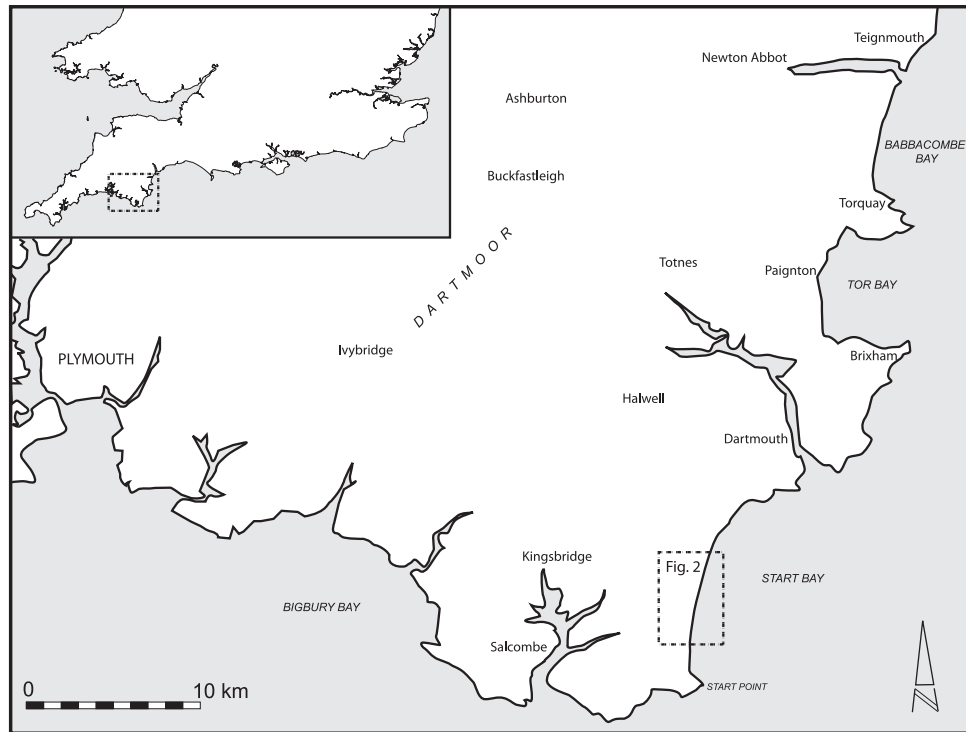
Samuel Walls & Howard Williams

*In this article we explore a pair of distinctive and associated Second World War monuments on Slapton Sands in the South Hams district of Devon, UK. The Slapton Sands Evacuation Memorial was erected in 1945 by the US armed forces to commemorate the sacrifice of local people who evacuated their homes ahead of battle training in preparation for D-Day. Meanwhile, the Torcross Tank Memorial was built in 1984 under the initiative of a local man to commemorate those US servicemen who lost their lives during the battle training in the Exercise Tiger tragedy. The historical context, form, materiality, biography and location of each monument are appraised and their relationship with each other is discussed. The article argues that from the 1940s to the present day, the monuments have evolved as sacrificial sites and serve to both commemorate the events they describe and define the identities of local people through their reuse of places and material culture.*

The last two decades have seen burgeoning archaeological contributions to the study of conflict commemoration as part of a growing sub-discipline of 'combat' or 'conflict' archaeology (e.g. Saunders 2007; Schofield 2005a; Tarlow 1997). Adopting a cross-disciplinary perspective, archaeologists have both emphasized the role of war memorials in creating emotive foci, and orchestrating processes of selective remembering and forgetting through their design and symbolism as well as through their biographies, materialities and landscape contexts (Rowlands 1999; Saunders 2007). Also, rather than being simply popular expressions of either emotion or national identity, war memorials have been regarded as contested and multi-vocal material culture operating at different scales from the local to regional, national and international arenas. In this sense, war memorials interact with other memory-sites in their locality and become the focus for diverse meanings, commemorative practices and conflicts for communities (e.g. Rainbird 2003; Tarlow 1997; see also Bartlett & Ellis 1999).

We aim to contribute further to the debate surrounding the material culture of conflict commemoration by considering both *how* and *why* war memorials operate in the creation and evolution of a landscape of

memory with ambivalent and discordant elements. We explore how this is achieved through the composite forms and elements, multi-media, materialities and biographies of the monuments in question but also through their reuse of place and militaria. In doing so, we redress an imbalance in recent scholarship towards the study of First World War memorials including their construction, meanings and life-histories (e.g. Rainbird 2003; Tarlow 1997; Saunders 2007) while Second World War monuments and memorials to civilian sacrifices have received limited attention (although see for example: Gough 2000; Beck *et al.* 2009). Certainly while archaeologists have widely viewed monuments as contested by different groups and individuals (Bender 1998) set within 'discordant landscapes' (Schofield 2005b) and consideration has been given to the archaeological process itself in the memory-creation and memory-conflicts (e.g. Crossland 2000), the archaeological study of the use of monuments to actively challenge official discourse on conflict or promote the remembrance of either forgotten or untold conflict events is in its infancy. In addressing these issues, we also challenge the existing tendency in research across disciplines to either consider monuments in isolation or as a 'type'; we do



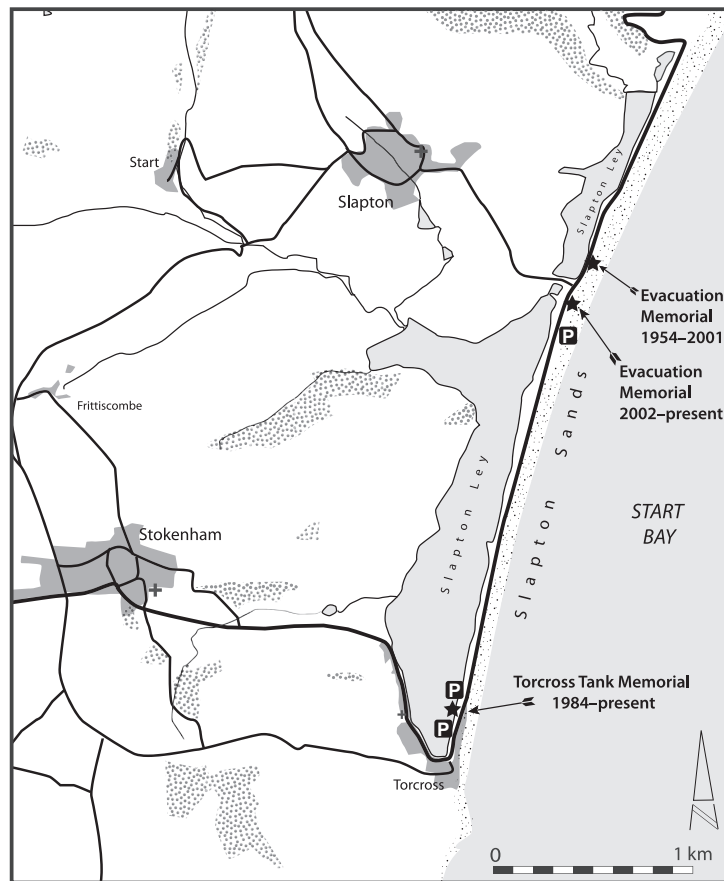
**Figure 1.** *Map of the South Hams of Devon.*

this by exploring both the planned and unintentional contrasts and connections between two monuments in the same locality. Our case study has lessons for studies of the relationships between material culture, monuments and memory for all periods of the past of which the last decade has seen a burgeoning literature (e.g. Van Dyke & Alcock 2003; Bradley 2002; Holtorf 1997; Jones 2007; Williams 2003). We also point the way to potential further research exploring the commemoration of twentieth-century conflict in relation to broader trends in commemoration through material culture, monuments and landscape from an archaeological perspective (e.g. Holtorf & Williams 2006; Moshenska 2008; Saunders 2007).

To this end, our focus is a unique pairing of Second World War memorials in the South Hams of Devon, England. The monuments in question are the Slapton Sands Evacuation Memorial (Slapton parish) and the Torcross Tank Memorial (Stokenham parish).<sup>1</sup> The monuments occupy a striking piece of Devon's shoreline and are located a short distance from each other upon Slapton Sands, Start Bay (Figs. 1 & 2). The monuments are unique in terms of the subject commemorated (both civilian and military sacrifices during war-time), the relationship between the civilian population and the military (one of 'friendly occupation') and the tragic loss of military personnel

during training exercises and away from the battlefield (deaths that lack official memorialization in the Devon landscape or elsewhere). The case study presented also reveals the complex human and material agencies involved in conflict commemoration. Neither monument is the product of UK authorities or even the consensus of local communities; they were impositions from outside or within the community. Yet as 'realms of memory' (Nora 1989), they subsequently accrued significance through both the process of their creation and their subject 'afterlives' (Holtorf 1997) in which memories of the civilian evacuation and military deaths were perceived with ambivalence. The two monuments and their settings shed new light on how monuments operate in constructing social memories and in questioning nationalist discourses of conflict commemoration (White 1999).

There is one further aspect of this case study that has wider importance and justifies an archaeological perspective. The research began as one element of an archaeological survey and excavation project in the parish of Stokenham between 2005 and 2007 that incorporated the recording of recent mortuary monuments (Williams & Williams 2007; Simpson & Williams 2008). Yet a particular 'archaeological' dimension of this study is the fact that the monuments 'reuse' the past in contrasting ways (see papers in Bradley



**Figure 2.** Location map of the two memorials in the parishes of Slapton and Stokenham in the South Hams district of Devon.

& Williams 1998). The Evacuation Memorial did so through its location on the beach close to the site of a local landmark destroyed by wartime bombing. Meanwhile, the discovery of military artefacts by metal-detecting inspired a subsequent campaign to raise a tank from the seabed as the centrepiece of the Torcross Tank Memorial.

In one sense, the process of retrieving and displaying a tank — itself an ambivalent form of *matériel* culture rarely employed in British war memorials — can be viewed as comparable to the treatment of First World War militaria as trophies and mementos (Saunders 2007), the civilian collection of Second World War shrapnel (Moshenska 2008) and campaigns to excavate, restore or present militaria in war memorials and museums (e.g. Legendre 2001; White 1999). Such retrieved materials have biographies but also they evoke powerful emotions and associations; in this sense they appear to break out and beyond the controlled and formal messages of state-organized commemorative monuments.

Through the reuse of place and material culture, the two monuments illustrate how the past is used to create memories and identities in the present (Holtorf & Williams 2006) and by which the identity of the discoverer and the discovered are interwoven in a particular socio-political setting. This latter process can be viewed as a form of antiquarianism or amateur-archaeological engagement with the past in which ruins and retrieved artefacts are perceived as active mnemonic agents that tell stories to their discoverers and revealed a hidden or forgotten past (Schnapp 2008; see also papers in Edgeworth 2006; Saunders 2007). Yet for these monuments, neither memories of the discovered and discoverer nor the commemorated or the commemorator, are the principal outcomes. Indeed both monuments, which were imposed by others, have become co-opted into the forging of local identities, generations after their construction and for those who neither experienced the commemorated events nor campaigned for their remembrance.

Let us now explore the background to the events commemorated and then each monument in turn. The observations presented here were compiled from archaeological fieldwork and research conducted between 2005 and 2008.<sup>2</sup> Discussions of the context of this fieldwork and the local interest in the Second World War and the wider landscape of informal commemoration linked to the monuments can be found elsewhere (Williams & Williams 2007; Walls forthcoming).

### **The Second World War in the South Hams: evacuation and battle-training**

Between December 1943 and the summer of 1944, a large portion of the rural South Hams district of Devon, focusing upon Slapton and Blackpool Sands, were evacuated. In six weeks, a total of 30,000 acres of land, 180 farms and 3000 people from around 750 families, all their belongings, animals and farm equipment had to be moved (Bradbeer 1973, 46; Hoyt 1987, 82; Rose-Price & Parnell 2004). While receiving compensation, many residents suffered 'a total bereavement' upon evacuation and there were even reports of suicides occurring (Chard 1980, 83–5). The temporary evacuation led to a permanent dislocation in certain instances, with several families staying in their new homes, and some elderly residents dying during the evacuation. For those that did return, the situation was traumatic given the transformed landscape they encountered. As well as the traces of neglect and looting, the military occupation and live-fire exercises damaged and destroyed buildings, fields, woodland and much of the shoreline (Bradbeer 1973, 49; Chard 1980, 84; Murch *et al.* 2005).

Around 15,000 US troops used the evacuated area for battle-training ahead of D-Day including a series of practice landings (Oswald 1988, 109). During the military exercises, accidents occurred involving the deaths of US servicemen on both land and sea. There were also reports of 'friendly fire' incidents given that live ammunition and shells were used throughout the battle-training exercises (Lewis 1990; Bass 2008). However, the largest loss of life took place during the early hours on 28 April 1944, the second day of the penultimate training exercise: 'Exercise Tiger'. A convoy of eight LSTs<sup>3</sup> were crossing Lyme Bay to initiate practice-landings at Slapton Sands at daybreak. They were attacked by German torpedo boats ('Schnellboot') at just after 2.00 am and torpedoes sank two of the LSTs and severely damaged another. The attack resulted in a considerable loss of life, with 749 official listed casualties comprising both

US navy and army personnel (Small 1988); although the number of casualties is strongly debated (Bass 2008). The events were shrouded in secrecy to ensure the success of the Normandy landings. Subsequently, following standard military protocol of the time, those that died were listed as losing their lives in the Normandy campaign, rather than within the specific context of the training exercises.

The circumstances of this loss of life compounded the tragedy of the event in post-war perception, particularly as the story emerged how the success of the German attack was the result of a litany of errors by the British and US navies. While the accusations aimed at both the American and British governments of a post-war cover-up cannot be sustained, it is evident that Exercise Tiger did not have a discrete and official place in the memory and commemoration of the Second World War separate from D-Day. Certainly many survivors believed that the top-secret status of the incident remained in force after the war and only wished to tell their story by the 1980s (Lewis 1990; Small 1988). The flurry of interest in Exercise Tiger in the early 1980s was partly motivated by veterans reaching old age and fearing that the memory of the training exercises would end with them as well as the renewed interest in D-Day with the approach of its fortieth anniversary. This threat of an end to the memory of Exercise Tiger extended from US veterans to local people in the South Hams. This stimulated much of the renewal in interest, articulation and ultimately the desire for material commemoration for the American casualties during the battle-training for the Normandy landings. Therefore, while recognized as an official incident separate to D-Day and recorded in numerous post-war histories of the conflict, by the 1980s there developed a strong perception that the events embodied tragic failures in the Allied command and were kept secret and/or 'forgotten' through a passive disregard for the unique nature of the incident (e.g. Small 1988). It is against this historical background that we can now consider the two monuments raised to commemorate the evacuation and battle training.

### **Commemorating the evacuation**

The American occupation was short-lived but it left manifold scars on the landscape of the evacuated area. When the civilian population was allowed to return to the area, the initial concerns were not with commemorating the evacuation but with social forgetting through the practical work of restoration. This involved repairing, rebuilding and rejuvenating the working agricultural landscape and removing most of



the traces of the American presence in the process (see Bradbeer 1973). This is not to say that the evacuation or the American forces were completely forgotten. Indeed some Americans had married local girls and settled in the southwest of England after the war. Furthermore, the occupation left immediate 'reminders' of the US presence; munitions left behind were regularly uncovered and explosions continued to kill livestock (Bradbeer 1973, 110; Lewis 1990, 185). There was also damage to buildings and even human lives lost by ordnance left behind by the American troops (e.g. Lewis 1990, 162). The damage, the discovery of munitions and occasional explosions combined to serve as physical reminders of the occupation and the trauma of evacuation. Yet absences also created remembrance — the physical absences of things past (especially of people who had died during the evacuation or decided not to return, destroyed structures and lost or plundered possessions). The absences ranged from missing buildings and landmarks such as the Royal Sands Hotel on Slapton Sands (demolished following wartime damage) to missing belongings, which had been left behind in the rush to evacuate and were stolen or destroyed. Another reminder was the traces of restitution themselves; the recent repairs to field boundaries and buildings, including several of the churches of the evacuation area that had been damaged by the US occupation (Bradbeer 1973, 120–29).

Therefore, for these communities, like many British civilian landscapes and townscapes affected by bombing during the Second World War, formal commemoration was not at the forefront of their mind. Yet physical reminders of the war and military occupation were everywhere in the form of both material presences and absences (Schofield 2005a, 43–51). In the case of the South Hams, the battle-training made it a unique 'landscape of memory' very different from the battlefields that have received recent attention (see Saunders 2007, 64–97). Simultaneously and paradoxically, the absence of traces of any of the military deaths linked to Exercise Tiger haunted the Devon landscape.

Yet commemoration did occur in a unique form: the Evacuation Memorial was erected by the US Army and Navy in July 1945 soon after the end of the European conflict. The monument is comprised of an obelisk flanked by two flag poles donated by the American Forces to commemorate the sacrifice of local people by surrendering their homes and lands (Fig. 3). The initial unveiling ceremony of 1945 has however been largely forgotten (e.g. Lewis 1990; Bradbeer 1973; Chard 1980) and the ceremony which took place in July 1954 has been mistakenly portrayed as the unveiling ceremony.



**Figure 3.** *The Slapton Sands Evacuation Memorial, looking west from Slapton Sands beach. (Photograph: Samuel Walls, 2008.)*

Both ceremonies had similar amounts of attendance with military personnel and council officials dominating the numbers. In contrast, only a 'scattering' of the local population attended despite the majority of those who were evacuated being invited (Lewis 1990, 209). This may hint that the occupation was still a very painful period for the majority to remember. In his 1954 speech General Gruenther<sup>4</sup> made reference to the human losses (Lewis 1990, 187), that had been ignored during the 1945 ceremony which had focused upon the repairing of the landscape and homes. The ceremonies set a lasting precedent in regarding both the evacuation and Exercise Tiger together within the discourse of patriotic sacrifice: a necessary price and lesson learned to ensure the success of the Normandy landings. Moreover, the occupation and human losses were framed in relation to the continued vitality of the Anglo-American relationship. In the height of the Cold War, NATO was portrayed as paralleling the cooperative closeness exemplified by the wartime sacrifices of the South Hams (Bradbeer 1973, 131–3; Lewis 1990, 187). The emphasis upon the British civilian 'sacrifice' might be even regarded as an attempt to sidestep the

military failings of the Allies that led to the Exercise Tiger tragedy (e.g. Hoyt 1987; Lewis 1990; Small 1988). Indeed, the mode of commemoration certainly stands in stark contrast to the named British war dead across the region's First World War memorials (Walls 2010). Furthermore, the disparity between commemorative presence of British civilians and absence of a memorial to the US servicemen could not be greater.

The location selected for the Slapton Sands Evacuation Memorial was apposite in a number of ways (Fig. 2). No attempt was made to compete with the traditional repertoire of village-based British war memorials. Instead, the site chosen was adjacent to one of the area's most prominent pre-war landmarks and one of the few buildings in the area that was not rebuilt: the Royal Sands Hotel (see above). The hotel was on the seafront midway along Slapton Sands where the most concentrated shelling and activity had occurred during the occupation. The monument was also placed adjacent to the only junction from the road traversing Slapton Sands and leading over the Ley to Slapton village. This route had provided a vital artery during the training exercises. It was also roughly the location which had divided Slapton Sands into 'Red Beach' and 'White Beach' during Exercise Tiger (Lewis 1990, 172). Therefore, the monument makes reference to both the land and sea elements of the exercises. Originally the inscription faced the road with the sea as backdrop, making it prominent to all and implicitly commemorating both the evacuation and the training exercises. The beach-head location also evoked the Normandy beaches which were the ultimate prize resulting from the British civilian cooperation and US military presence in Devon.

This distinctive location has certainly ensured its enduring prominence. While imposed upon the South Hams and initially perceived with ambivalence, over time the monument has been adopted by local people as a symbol of local history and identity. Indeed, the Slapton Sands Evacuation Memorial has escaped the sense of ubiquity and predictability of the form and location of Devon's First and Second World War memorials and escaped affinity with any one settlement (Walls 2010). Since the 1950s, the monument has served as a focus for commemorative rituals to both the civilian and military losses. It has acquired more than a local appeal. In addition to the memorial services and informal visits by locals, the monument has been visited by war veterans. Its beachhead location has also facilitated visits from a regular stream of tourists who pass by en route to Devon's popular south coast and picturesque villages and stop to enjoy Slapton beach and the nature reserve of Slapton Ley.

The form of the monument reflected this choice of landscape setting as well as the taste of its American commissioners (Fig. 3). The monument comprises of a prominent pillar intended to be seen from far and wide across the flat Sands with flag-poles located immediately on the south and north sides. The monument became a landmark, which harked back to the hotel which had served a similar purpose for those travelling by land and sea before the war. While its location and size make it stand out from the war memorials in neighbouring villages, the form also contains traditional elements as an adaption of the modernist cenotaph design common of First World War memorials (Winter 1995) as well as the obelisks popular in US memorial culture (Doss 2008). This is echoed in the use of three steps and the creation of a surrounding defined space marking it as a focus for commemorative rituals and wreath-laying (Walls 2010). The choice of white stone (light grey Dartmoor granite) reflects the choice of national memorials in the United States and in particular Washington (Doss 2008). The colour evokes a sense of purity and nobility while its materiality alludes to the landscape of Devon.

In addition to its distinctive location, the inscription also makes explicit that it is not a typical war memorial. Reflecting the speeches of 1945 and 1954, the text wraps the enforced civilian evacuation within the language of patriotic self-sacrifice common for the war-dead. The selflessness of the South Hams communities saved lives and ensured Allied victory.<sup>5</sup> The monument was therefore in many ways a contradiction, remembering a civilian sacrifice, erected by the US forces and situated outside of any settlement within the former training area. Yet while claiming that the civilian sacrifice saved lives, in memorial terms it serves to 'forget' the US servicemen themselves who lost their lives (for example Lewis 1990, 173).

Beyond the focus of tourists, a landmark for locals and for remembrance services (which it shared from 1984 with the Torcross Tank Memorial) the monument itself has changed little from its erection until soon after the millennium. This steady-state ended dramatically when the monument was nearly washed away by the substantial storm damage of January 2001. The monument was taken down while extensive works were done to consolidate the beach and protect the road and Slapton Ley nature reserve. It was a reflection of the perceived importance of the monument to local people that they quickly demanded its relocation and rebuilding (BBC 2001).

The rebuilding of the monument provided the opportunity to add to the text the name of the village

of Sherford that had been accidentally left off the original monument. The monument was also placed in a new location owing to the coastal erosion a full c. 250 m south of its original setting. The new position was immediately next to the car park, and thereby c. 50 m to the south side of the road junction where the road from Slapton village joins the A379 (Figs. 1 & 2). Indeed, possibly to prevent accidents caused by car-drivers stopping to read the inscription, the orientation of the monument was reversed. From 2002 the inscription faced away from the road in the opposite direction, out to sea. It is now approached from the car park where an information board was placed (now destroyed by the elements) explaining the monument.

This substantially changed its use as a landmark for locals, drivers and fishermen and perhaps also its significance by emphasizing the connection with the sea. The car park had always been close to the monument and served as a popular destination to those visiting the beach and the nature reserve of Slapton Ley.<sup>6</sup> Yet by moving the monument closer to it in 2001, the monument took on a spatial relationship with a car park and public toilets that is comparable to that of Torcross Tank Memorial (constructed from 1984, see below) and facilitated a more extensive flow of visitors. The rededication ceremony took place on 13 November 2002, marking the 59th anniversary of the evacuation. Since then, the fate of Slapton Sands has been a prime concern for local people and businesses with ongoing debates over the ability to retain the beach, the road along it and the nature reserve behind it, into the future (BBC 2004a; Slapton Line Partnership 2009). The monument has therefore not only become an important symbol of the history of the local communities by embodying a collective pride of the region's unique war-time sacrifice. It also constitutes a symbol of the area's threatened future identity and prosperity, enmeshed with concerns over the fate of the beach, road, a wildlife habitat and ultimately the region's tourist trade.

The Slapton Sands Evacuation Memorial has had a further role in the commemoration of the occupation. First, the absence of any mention of deaths on the monument may have led people to question the official American and British narrative it presented. Second, its presence also acted as a stimulus for the 'archaeological' recovery of the memory of the military casualties of the training exercises. This occurred in 1971<sup>7</sup> during the construction of the Slapton Memorial Car Park (though at this time the monument was not immediately next to the car park). The car park was being built on the site of the Royal Sands Hotel to stop visitors parking

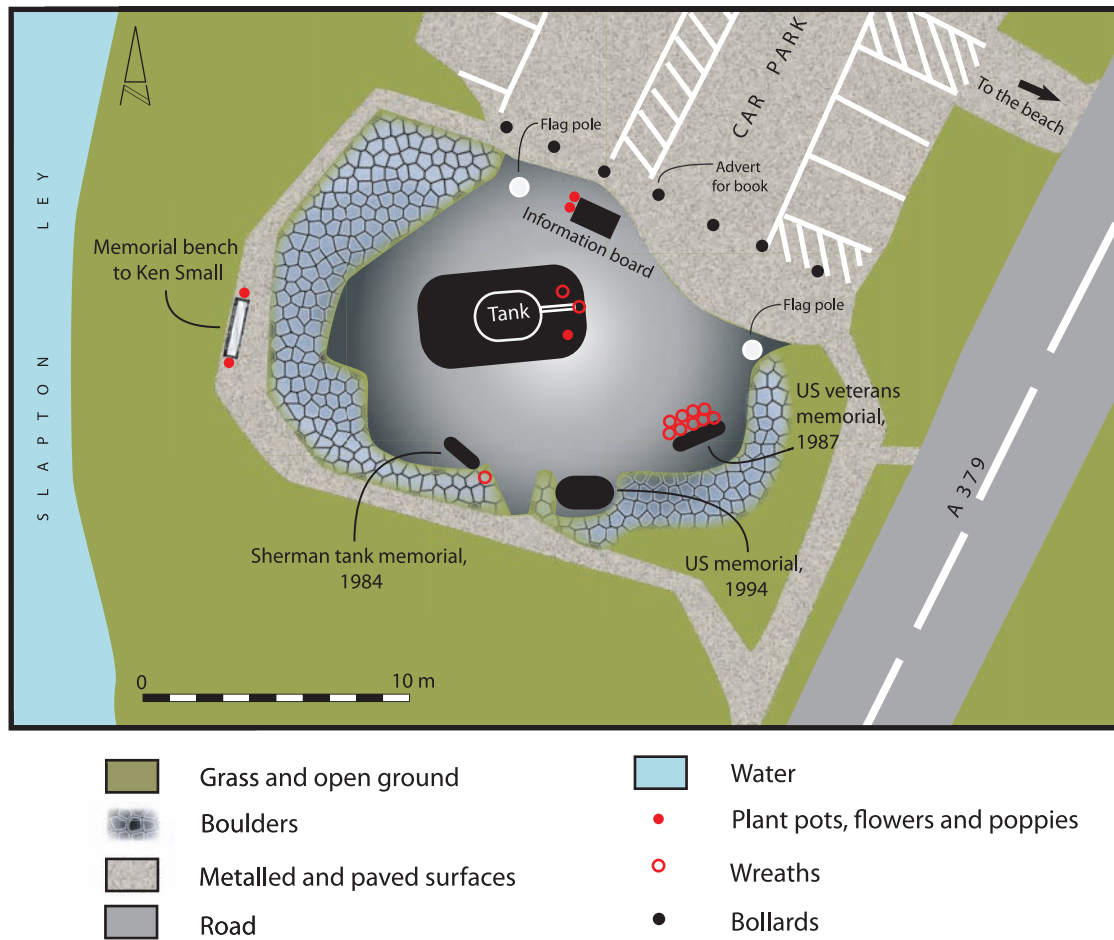
on the shingle verges, exacerbating beach erosion and damaging wild flowers. During the early stages of site preparation, a bulldozer uncovered a British anti-tank mine which was subsequently detonated by a bomb disposal squad (Bradbeer 1973, 133). This was not an unusual event (as we have already seen) since rediscovered ordnance had continually acted as a stimulus to the memories of occupation in the region (Lewis 1990, 195; see also Moshenska 2008). This event, however, was a formative occasion for a key individual who would dramatically alter the commemorative landscape. Ken Small was beachcombing nearby at the time of the discovery and detonation. In a deep valley carved by the sea close to the Slapton Sands Evacuation Memorial he found 'tons of shrapnel and shell cases, live and spent bullets of all calibres, military buttons, bits of military vehicles and pieces of piping' (Small 1988, 109). The unexploded wartime ordnance, the retrieved militaria and the monument's presence combined to inspire Small to develop a new war memorial close by at Torcross that remembered the 'forgotten dead' (Small 1988, 109; Lewis 1990, 195).

### Commemorating Exercise Tiger

Initially constructed in 1984, the Torcross Tank Memorial is a composite and multi-phased monument which has been repeatedly augmented through the 1980s and 1990s (Figs. 4 & 5). Its appearance could not be more different from the Evacuation Memorial. In addition to the tank and its landscaped memorial space and paths, there are three memorial plaques (Figs. 6 & 7) and a notice board that provide foci for the anniversary celebrations, wreath-laying and informal visits by locals and tourists (Fig. 4). The principal formal similarity with the Evacuation Memorial is the presence of two flagpoles, framing the monument when approached from the north (from the car park). With multiple entrances and paths of movement, the monument comprises of a deliberately asymmetrical and fluid memorial space facilitating both individual engagement and a context for formal commemorative practices. Given the singular agency of Ken Small in the making of this monument and the importance of the creation process in understanding its final form and subsequent use, it is essential to explain the importance of retrieved militaria in both inspiring the monument and constituting it.

Ken Small was born in Hull in 1930. It was his experience of the German bombing of the city (Small 1988, 97–8), collecting shrapnel and other militaria as a child as well as meeting American servicemen that was to resurface in his engagement with Exercise





**Figure 4.** *Plan of the Torcross Tank Memorial.*

Tiger (Small 1988, 109–10; see Moshenska 2008). Small became a policeman and then a businessman in Grimsby before buying a guest house and boat at Torcross in 1968 and subsequently cultivating a close affiliation with both the sea and land in this coastal hamlet (Small 1988, 104). Following a nervous breakdown, he moved from fishing to beachcombing by eye and metal-detector on the shore. He found this re-engagement with the childhood practice of collecting shrapnel an all-absorbing and therapeutic practice that aided in his mental recovery (Small 1988, 105–8).

This psychological context and material engagement with recovered artefacts explains Small's increasing fascination with Exercise Tiger and its commemoration. Small recovered bullets, shell cases, military buttons and a petrol cap from a military vehicle. He recognized that the: '...beach was covered with militaria...' and that his '...senses told [him] that something was not right' (Small 1988, 109). In

other words, his engagement with the past was first and foremost through the landscape and material culture. It was also inspired by the existing physical presence of the Evacuation Memorial (see above), and only subsequently did Small become acquainted with Exercise Tiger by talking with locals. In all these senses his approach might be seen as 'antiquarian' or even 'archaeological' rather than historical. By his own account, it became a matter of personal and spiritual conviction to him to rectify the physical absence of the events from his contemporary landscape and the absence of the US servicemen's remembrance upon the Evacuation Memorial itself. He stated that these material traces had a profound personal effect upon him: 'It plagued me — haunted me — as I carried on beachcombing' (Small 1988, 109).

Beachcombing did not satisfy Small's desire to commemorate Exercise Tiger. Through his fishing contacts he was informed that an underwater object often snagged trawler nets in Start Bay. When investi-



**Figure 5.** *The DD Sherman Tank, the centrepiece of the Torcross Tank Memorial. The bench dedicated to Ken Small can be seen behind the tank. (Photograph: Howard Williams, 2004.)*



**Figure 6.** *A view of the three memorial plaques at the Torcross Tank Memorial. To the right, the first plaque (1984) explaining the monument and its rationale, to the left the second plaque (1987) donated by a US Army veteran's group and the third plaque in the middle (1994) dedicated by the United States Naval Memorial Foundation. (Photograph: Samuel Walls, 2008.)*





**Figure 7.** The third memorial plaque erected next to the tank at Torcross to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary in 1994. Both text and image serve to evoke the tragedy of Exercise Tiger and provide a naval element to the memorial to complement the 1987 memorial raised by an US army veterans' association. The photograph was taken immediately upon placing and before a screen of bullet-proof glass was added in order to shield the plaque from potential vandalism. (Reproduced with the kind permission of the Slapton Sands Tank Memorial Ltd.)

gated, this object was discovered to be an amphibious Duplex Drive (DD) Sherman tank lost during the landing exercises although not directly connected to the tragedy of Exercise Tiger (Small 1988, 110). Perhaps inspired by the raising of similar DD Sherman tanks on the Normandy beaches during the 1970s and their display as D-Day memorials, Small dedicated himself to the idea of raising the tank as a monument to remember the forgotten dead of Exercise Tiger (Small 1988, 113). Small clearly believed he was acting for the dead themselves and would not be swayed even by survivors. Indeed a local friend and American veteran of Exercise Tiger (Manny Rubin) warned him against raising the tank, not least for fear of bodies lying within it. However, in Small's own words he was completely dedicated to the venture: 'There is no

doubt that I was obsessed, there is no other word for it' (Small 1988, 115).

Ken Small was motivated by a clear image of: 'these men in the dark waters of the English Channel' (Small 1988, 131), and these absent bodies proved inspiration for more than the memorial but the restitution of his own identity. At this time, Small opted to wear only black clothing, not that he could explain why he started wearing the colour: 'It just seemed to happen and stay with me' (Small 1988, 114). The colour of his clothes and their religious overtones emphasized his state of perpetual mourning for the US servicemen that he increasingly dedicated his time and finances to commemorating. He was referred to locally as the 'Black Saint' and to his death he retained this dress through years of daily proximity with the black tank

where he talked to visitors and sold copies of his book. Retrieved artefacts also constituted Small's connection to the past through his clothing; the pendant he wore was comprised of pieces of beach-combed treasures including a ring with diamonds set in platinum and a twenty-four carat gold plate from a very old watch (Small 1988, 115). He also displayed beach-combed militaria in his guest house as props to narrate Exercise Tiger to guests. The material culture of the beach defined Small's identity in relation to Exercise Tiger but it was only a catalyst for commemoration. It was by creating a monument that the absent dead could be remembered and afforded a corporeality and place in the Devon landscape and created a new identity for Ken Small.

Small spent many years and much effort in raising the tank, overcoming innumerable obstacles and facing financial hardship as a direct result. After he had purchased the tank for \$50 from the US government, he set about fulfilling his ambition of raising it in time for the 40th anniversary of D-Day (Small 1988, 117–30). Despite the many frustrations of dealing with both US and British governments and mounting personal debts, the day finally came when Small saw the tank hauled from the water in a five-day operation in 1984 (Fig. 8). Coinciding with renewed interest in the Second World War ahead of the imminent fortieth-anniversary celebrations, the event took place soon after Exercise Tiger had hit US television audiences and received national news coverage (Tendler 1984; Small 1988, 141–8). Champagne was cracked on the tank and the rusted hulk was hauled up the beach, across the road and into a space at the south end of the Torcross car park (Small 1988, 149). The theatre of its recovery is an example of the mnemonic power of military vessels and vehicles raised from the seabed; for instance many onlookers at the time would not have forgotten the memorable raising of Henry VIII's flagship the *Mary Rose* two years earlier (Flatman 2003, 150). Such 'excavations' not only re-connect place with existing social memories, but serve to generate new forms of commemoration (Legendre 2001; Saunders 2007; Williams & Williams 2007). The location chosen for the monument by Small was on disused ground next to the car park, a respectful distance from, but mirroring the location of the Evacuation Memorial to the north.

However, as an unofficial memorial created by the unique vision of one man rather than local consensus, from the moment of its retrieval to the present day, the Torcross tank has become a monument of conflict as much as a monument to conflict. Shortly after the tank's raising, it became a symbol of a new



**Figure 8.** *The amphibious Sherman tank photographed while being raised from the seabed in March 1984. Ken Small stands on the tank that he had bought and paid for as a war memorial to the dead of Exercise Tiger. He wears his distinctive black attire and pendant made from beach-combed artefacts. (Reproduced with the kind permission of the Slapton Sands Tank Memorial Ltd.)*

campaign by Small for its official recognition by the US government. In addition to letters of gratitude, the US authorities provided an official memorial, augmenting the plaque provided by Ken himself (Small 1988, 155–7).<sup>8</sup> Small was visited by veterans and visited the States himself, becoming an honorary member of the 70th US Tank Battalion Association (Small 1988, 162). He visited Washington where he met with Congresswoman Beverly Byron who made a speech in Congress on 11 September 1985 concerning the Tank Memorial and Exercise Tiger (Small 1988, 164). Following a meeting with the US Deputy Defence Secretary, a Bill was passed through the House of Representatives recognizing the human losses of Exercise Tiger (Small 1988, 172). His efforts and the publicity that they received eventually enabled the scattered veterans and survi-



vors to pool their memories through a material focus (Lewis 1990, 199). Small's long interest in the tank therefore stimulated the formation of veteran groups and memorial projects in the US that eventually led to a third memorial plaque being placed in time for the fiftieth anniversary celebrations in 1994.

Many researchers — not least veterans themselves — were involved in promoting and commemorating the memory of Exercise Tiger during the early 1980s including its rendering in fiction (Thomas 1981). After 1984, a number of popular accounts emerged (e.g. Hoyt 1987; Lewis 1990). Despite this, Small's book casts himself as the sole custodian of the memory of Exercise Tiger and the monument illustrated his close affinity with the events, the dead and the seascape and landscape of Slapton Sands (Small 1988). Small was a self-appointed and unofficial story-teller, archivist, priest and undertaker, offering 'peace of mind' to survivors who visited the monument that he had created. The tank did not simply serve to remember, but to actively reconstitute memories that were perceived as 'forgotten'; the exhumation of the tank from the seabed serving to metaphorically raise memories from hidden depths. The efforts were largely successful in so far as the tank now forms the main focus of commemorative ceremonies on the anniversary of Exercise Tiger and the tragedy of Exercise Tiger is now widely known in the region, nationally and internationally.<sup>9</sup>

Yet the monument evokes a variety of conflicting responses from veterans and visitors from respect and gratitude to sadness and anger at the events of 28 April 1944. While Small's tenacious campaign led to official US recognition for his monument and many friends among veterans' groups, Small struggled to receive support from the British military, government or local authorities. The configuration of the monument was one of tension and conflict between Small and a range of other groups, principally the District Council. From his own account (Small 1988, 183) it is clear that he felt snubbed and often sidelined over decisions concerning remembrance ceremonies at the tank (Small 1988, 174–6). This may reflect the idiosyncratic nature of the project and Small's personality, but this was soon after the Falklands War and during the Reagan-Thatcher Cold War entente in which D-Day was actively evoked as the age-old and successful alliance of the Anglo-American powers (see Connelly 2004, 219–20, 276–80). In this climate, it is likely that British authorities were reluctant to support the commemoration of an event that cast a shadow over a portrayal of the Second World War as a story of seamless Anglo-American relations.

Even the location and maintenance of the monument was a source of confusion and conflict. Small

states that this location was approved by the Chairman of the District Council (presumably verbally) before the raising of the tank but this seems to have been a focus of subsequent dispute (Small 1988, 153–4). Small (and following his death the Slapton Sands Memorial Tank Limited) owned the tank itself (Anon. 2009b). Meanwhile the land upon which it is situated was leased by the District Council from the Field Studies Council which in turn lease the land from the Whitley Wildlife Conservation Trust. This complex situation has led to ongoing disputes over the maintenance of the monument. Despite this, Small physically defended his monument through his daily presence at the tank all year round.

Yet dissonance also surrounded the interpretation of the Tank Memorial and over this Small found that he could not fully control the monument's message. Soon after its creation, the media frenzy over Exercise Tiger centred less on the tank as a successful commemorative monument and its promotion of Exercise Tiger than on the whereabouts of the bodies of the 'forgotten' dead. To Small's frustration, the media paid great interest in rumours fuelled by the purported eyewitness account of a local woman, Dorothy Seekings (Lewis 1990, 200–2, 219–21). She claimed to know where bodies of servicemen were buried in fields near Blackawton. Small was initially interested in the reports but was clearly angry that they upset veterans and the families of those lost in Exercise Tiger (Small 1988, 199–212). Yet it also revealed the clear inadequacies of his monument because, as with all cenotaphs, while the tank provided a new collective 'body' for the dead, it could never give the victims of Exercise Tiger a final 'resting place'. Indeed, just as the Evacuation Memorial had drawn Small to the absent dead, so the tank in turn led the media to look for a 'hidden' mass-grave.

Despite the lack of evidence (the graves of those who perished in the Exercise Tiger tragedy were most likely interred in war cemeteries or repatriated to the States), the rumours of a hidden burial site in the South Hams fulfilled a popular desire to locate the forgotten dead that the tank could never substitute. Small made it clear that, in his view, if the scenario occurred that bodies of US servicemen had remained in the South Hams, they should be left alone (Small 1988, 212). Upon visiting the site where he believed bodies still lay, he commented that they should be '... left to rest in peace for ever more...' and he eschewed any 'macabre search for skeletons' (Small 1988, 211). Yet the search for the absent dead has been perpetuated by the lack of a memorial listing the names of all of those who died, despite the intentions to erect

one once the long-term future of the site is secured (J. Casson & D. Small pers. comm.).

As a focal point of disputes and conflicts over management, rituals and interpretation, the Torcross Tank Memorial neither passively commemorates but frames a military tragedy within the framework of sacrifice, complementing that portrayed on the Evacuation Memorial of civilian sacrifice. Yet the monument provides the opportunity for a diversity of engagements. This is rendered clearly in the fact that the monument is the focus of memorial texts but also spaces and surfaces which act as foci for both inscribing and incorporating mnemonic practices such as wreath-laying, flags, placing poppies and potted plants, walking, standing, reading the notice board and inscriptions, taking photographs, talking (to each other or until his death in 2004 with Ken Small) and touching the monument (Fig. 5). More so than the simple monolith of the Evacuation Memorial, it is a space for both ritual action and personal contemplation (Connerton 1989).

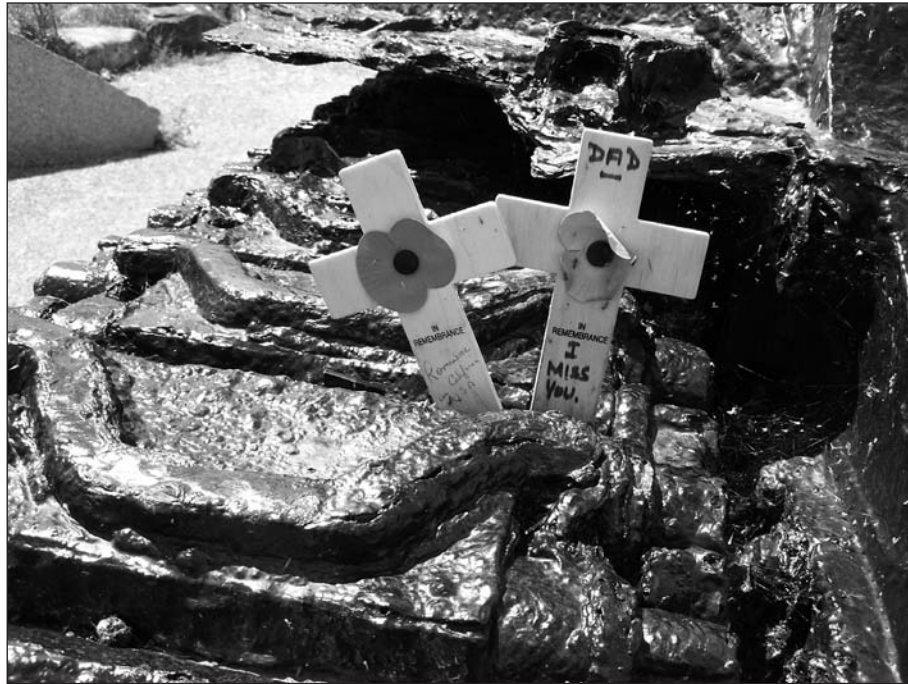
Yet tanks are ambivalent war memorials and it contrasts markedly with the Evacuation Memorial. Indeed they are rarely employed in the British landscape as war memorials given their overtly aggressive connotations. Indeed, the Torcross Tank finds closer parallels in the US commemorative repertoire of regimental home-bases and the battlefields of Europe, including the Normandy beaches, than with traditions of British war commemoration. Despite this, it is the tank's status as retrieval militaria as well as its colour and condition that render it a monument to tragedy. The tank contrasts not only with the 'official' materiality of the grey stones and bronze plaques of the memorials surrounding it but also with the monolithic whiteness of the Evacuation Memorial nearby. Upon its recovery, Small employed a firm called Fertan to immediately treat the rusted tank to prevent further degradation, sealing the tank and its rust within a black shell that requires annual re-painting (Small 1988, 151). The black was simply the colour of the preservative yet it mirrored Small's own clothing. Small regarded the blackness as appropriate to the sombre commemorative theme and its repainting is itself a repeated and embodied commemorative act. Indeed, it resonates with the well-publicized and disputed appearance of the Washington DC Vietnam War Memorial erected in 1982 (Doss 2008; Wagner-Pacifi & Schwartz 1991). Therefore, the power of the amphibious tank comes from its colour and its preservation in a ruinous (rather than restored) condition as well as its status as retrieved material culture. The tank was also emotive and vital for Small. Its tank-tracks were 'miraculously' preserved (Small

1988, 154) and the tank appeared to be 'weeping' when drawn out of the waves (Lewis 1990, 209). With such powerful associations, this tank is more ambivalent and evocative than a monolith or memorial plaque could ever have been.

Like, the Evacuation Memorial, the Torcross Tank draws upon a similar location outside of the main settlements, beside a car park and close to the beach, to gain its significance. The centrepiece of the monument is a retrieved object, yet it is only meaningful in the landscape where it was found. If the tank was 'of the sea' and its retrieval a metaphorical rebirth for the American dead and for Ken Small, then its location and landscape context 'restored' it into an historic landscape that it had never achieved in operating life. The location evoked the connection to the Devon landscape it never reached (like the servicemen it commemorates) since the tank was positioned on a 'beach' of cobbles and the memorial plaques were located on blocks of granite quarried especially on Dartmoor at Devon's heart. Yet the 'beach' upon which it is located might not be in Devon at all. This is because the tank's stance of action and combat while facing out to sea simultaneously evokes the battle-training and the D-Day landings in Normandy.

If the memorial evokes a role that it never achieved, then the American homelands of the dead servicemen are also evoked. The 1987 and 1994 memorial plaques were commissioned and made in the States. Furthermore, the tank went back to the States in the sense that visits by veterans inspired the construction of a US 'copy-cat' memorial at Fort Taber, New Bedford, Massachusetts built in 1989 (Anon. 2009a; Barcellos 1999; Le Blanc pers. comm.; R. Bromley pers. comm.). The differences are also notable, for the US memorial is painted in military colours and has the added numerology that each cobble upon which it rests symbolizes one of the lives lost in the official death toll. This makes explicit how the Torcross monument is neither an American monument situated on foreign shores nor a British war memorial to national sacrifice. If the location of the Evacuation Memorial re-signified a traditional local landmark lost during the war and a place pivotal to the evacuation and battle-training, then the Torcross Tank Memorial's became a node in a more complex network of spaces and places linked to military commemoration stretching from the US to Normandy and linking actual and unfulfilled pasts.

The tragic commemorative scheme of the Torcross Tank Memorial is clear in both its local significance and its global reach. In all senses, while the language of the memorial texts try their hardest,



**Figure 9.** *Crosses and poppies dedicated to Ken Small placed on the caterpillar track of the black-painted Sherman tank. The monument Small dedicated his life to create has now become a memorial to his life and campaign as well as the American servicemen who perished in the D-Day training exercises. (Photograph: Samuel Walls, 2008.)*

the materiality and landscapes alluding to unfulfilled pasts and homelands only serve to underline the tragedy of the events commemorated and deny the tank a fully patriotic and sacrificial association. Indeed, its unofficial and raw nature affords it as many similarities with counter-monuments (Young 1992; see also Gough 2000). The tank can be thus read on multiple registers as symbolizing peace and the futility of conflict, as much as the tragedy and sacrifice of servicemen in the Second World War.

Unlike the Evacuation Memorial commissioned by the US military, the informal origins of the Torcross Tank Memorial serves as an instance where the identities of the commemorated and the commemorator merge and are closely entwined through material culture. Unwittingly, the tank has also become a memorial to Ken Small himself. He is pictured on the information board which tells the story of the monument and the rationale for its construction. Both before and after Small's death, plaques were added to the bench to the west of the tank and potted plants beside the bench appear to be commemorative offerings to Small. From its construction in 1984 through to his death, Small himself provided a living component to the monument; he kept vigil at the tank 364 days a year

and repainted it every year with its thick black paint. Since 2004, a poppy and remembrance cross for Small have joined the wreaths laid upon the tank itself during anniversary services (Fig. 9). His published book has also become an element in the commemorative landscape — a small rain-stained printed notice on a wooden board, covered in plastic, and tied to one of the traffic bollards bears a message informing visitors that Small's book can be purchased at the nearby Sea Shanty restaurant and Torcross Post Office. Small therefore remains an ever present element of the memorial space, just as he did in life.

Inevitably, the Torcross Tank Memorial is neither purely commemorative of the American war-dead nor Ken Small, since both associations with the monument were adopted by local people. The Americans and Small alike have become heroic ancestors of the recent past. Certainly, many local people were initially sceptical and some outwardly critical of Small's campaign and of his motives including the fear that the tank had supplanted *their* Evacuation Memorial (D. Small pers. comm.). Yet today, both monuments are seen as part of the same commemorative landscape and with contrasting but complementary mnemonic associations. In tandem they garner a sense of local pride and



community identity (J. Baverstock pers. comm.; J. Casson pers. comm.; C. Pawley pers. comm.; Williams & Williams 2007).

## Conclusion

The Slapton Sands and Torcross Tank memorials were not planned together and evoke contrasting messages and forms. Both sit outside of the conventional repertoire of British conflict commemoration in contrasting ways, the first an official monument commissioned by the US Army and Navy to commemorate the 'sacrifice' of British civilians, the latter a product of an unsanctioned campaign by a local man to commemorate the American war dead and only slowly given official sanction. They share a prominent seaside setting adjacent to a major road at the heart of the wartime evacuation area and close to the landing grounds used in the US battle-training. Both are discrete from any of the main settlements in the South Hams and remain prominent landmarks for locals and tourists alike. Statistics of car parking fees for Torcross and Slapton Sands reveal the many thousands of visitors who flock to the area each summer (Alan Denbigh pers. comm.). Hence, the monuments have become important commemorative foci for local people, veterans and visitors despite conflicts over their use, meanings and continued existence. Indeed, the two monuments have developed a commemorative power through their association and interplay with each other. People drive and walk between them and memorial walks have enshrined this relationship. Furthermore, they are at the heart of a broader landscape of memory that binds the monuments as memory-sites in association with the beach and seascape, villages, churches, churchyards and pubs of the evacuation area (Walls forthcoming).

The Slapton Sands monuments share complex life-histories and uncertain futures, with the Slapton Sands Evacuation Memorial facing the ongoing threat of storm-damage and the Torcross Tank Memorial still remaining an ongoing 'project' rather than a complete structure. The Torcross Tank Memorial's future rests upon securing ongoing donations to maintain it in its present form and negotiate the complex issues of site maintenance and ownership between local authorities and the Slapton Sands Tank Memorial Company. A layer of thick black paint is added to the tank each year and there are also ongoing plans to augment the site with a further memorial that lists the names of all the victims of Exercise Tiger (Anon. 2009c; BBC 2007). For instance, prior to the 65th anniversary attended by three veterans as well as local dignitaries and inhabitants on 26 April 2009 (BBC 2009b), a

replacement information board was added. Therefore both monuments are unfolding sites of memory in the Devon landscape, acting as foci for formal and informal rituals of remembrance, and are embodiments of a variety of meanings and associations for locals, visitors and veterans (as well as nationalistic discourses and Anglo-American relations).

Pivotal to these roles is the double-sided nature of the events the monuments commemorate, the distinctive civilian evacuation and the deaths of military personnel of an Allied power during the occupation. Indeed, the sacrificial landscape has international tendrils, spreading to Cambridgeshire, Normandy and the United States. Moreover, it continues to evolve; the last of the surviving 'Schnellboot' used to attack the US convoy on 18 April 1944 has been purchased for restoration as a floating museum and monument in the southwest of England (BBC 2009a).

While there has been much discussion on the theory of conflict commemoration, this case study explores how two monuments involve multiple mnemonic associations, distinctive agencies, complex biographies and contrasting materialities of the monuments concerned. The study reveals how monuments interact with each other, connecting the commemoration of civilians and the military, an issue untouched upon in many studies. Moreover, both their landscape and seascape settings play an important part in affecting and constituting social memory and they did so through contrasting strategies. Soon after the war, the Evacuation Memorial commemorated through place: it was erected close to a landmark destroyed by conflict upon the beach where the training exercises occurred. In the 1980s, the Tank Memorial commemorated through object: reusing a piece of lost militaria to define connections to the landscape and promote the memory of the US servicemen killed in Exercise Tiger. In doing so, we have explored the contrasting ways in which monuments intersect with and challenge official narratives and perceptions of the past rather than reflecting a single coherent vision of warfare and sacrificial death.

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## Notes

1. In this article we employ the term 'monument' to emphasize the multi-media and composite character of the two sites involving not only text and image, but also structures and spaces facilitating inscribing and incorporating practices (Connerton 1989). The term also addresses a broader archaeological debate on the relationships between memory and monumentality (e.g. Bradley 1998; Holtorf 1997). The term 'monument' is also appropriate for our discussion because it incorporates the formal and informal, intended and unintended, permanent and ephemeral mnemonic properties of these sites. We restrict the use of the term 'memorial(s)' to the widely accepted phrase 'war memorial(s)' (and versions thereof), the officially accepted titles of the two sites and their plaques, and the commemorative services conducted at these sites.
2. The surveys were designed by Samuel Walls and Elizabeth Williams and conducted by University of Exeter students under the supervision of William Barrett. In total, the project recorded the systematic observations of the behaviour of 250 visitors to the memorials over a week in July 2007. We also conducted formal interviews with 30 visitors to the Torcross Tank Memorial in the same period.
3. 'Landing Ship, Tank': Allied naval vessels capable of carrying troops, equipment and vehicles for amphibious landing, and effectively employed on D-Day.
4. The Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in Europe.
5. THIS MEMORIAL WAS PRESENTED BY THE UNITED STATES ARMY AUTHORITIES TO THE PEOPLE OF THE SOUTH HAMS WHO GENEROUSLY LEFT THEIR HOMES AND THEIR LANDS TO PROVIDE A BATTLE PRACTICE AREA FOR THE SUCCESSFUL ASSAULT IN NORMANDY IN JUNE 1944. THEIR ACTION RESULTED IN THE SAVING OF MANY HUNDREDS OF LIVES AND CONTRIBUTED IN NO SMALL MEASURE TO THE SUCCESS OF THE OPERATION. THE AREA INCLUDED THE VILLAGES OF BLACKAWTON CHILLINGTON EAST ALLINGTON SHERFORD SLAPTON STOKENHAM STRETE AND TORCROSS TOGETHER WITH MANY OUTLYING FARMS & HOUSES.
6. Since 1971 when the car park was formally laid out, although cars had previously been allowed to park all along the verge of the road and in close proximity to the monument.
7. Small's account says '1974' but Bradbeer and Lewis both concur on 1971.
8. The original memorial plaque raised by Small reads: 'THIS AMERICAN SHERMAN TANK TOOK PART IN THE D-DAY PRACTICE LANDINGS AT SLAPTON BEACH IN 1944 WHERE IT WAS LOST AT SEA AND THERE REMAINED UNTIL ITS RECOVERY IN 1984. IT STANDS AS A MEMORIAL TO THOSE AMERICAN LIVES LOST DURING THE COURSE OF THE D-DAY PRACTICE LANDINGS AT SLAPTON BEACH IN 1944. THEIR SACRIFICE WAS NOT IN VAIN. BE THEY EVER AT PEACE.' The 1987 'Operation Tiger Memorial' reads: 'OPERATION TIGER MEMORIAL. Dedicated by the United States of America in honor of the men of the US Army's 1<sup>st</sup> Engineer Special Brigade, the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and the VII Corps Headquarters and the US Navy's 11<sup>th</sup> Amphibious Force who perished in the waters of Lyme Bay during the early hours of April 28 1944. They were on board landing ships tank (LSTs) of a convoy participating in Operation Tiger, a training exercise at Slapton Sands, Torcross, England. The exercise was in preparation for the assault on enemy forces at Utah Beach, Normandy, France. A surprise encounter with German torpedo boats (Schnellboots) resulted in the tragic loss of two of the landing ships and damage to two others. The lessons learned in the tragedy added significantly to the success of the Allies in the D-day landings in Normandy. May all these soldiers and sailors be remembered not only for their sacrifice but also for their contributions to the Allied cause of World War II. DONATED BY THE 1<sup>ST</sup> ENGINEER SPECIAL BRIGADE ASSOCIATION.'
9. Including the 60th anniversary in 2004 (BBC 2004b) and most recently the 65th anniversary in 2009 (BBC 2009b).

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